

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT  
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING  
Minutes of December 10, 2020**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich, Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Laurie Baroffio (Finance Director), John Helfant (Police Chief), and Mary McDaniel.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. In keeping with Governor Phil Scott's COVID-19 "stay at home" directive, the meeting was held remotely.

- II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):** None.

**III. BUDGET WORK SESSION**

- a. Board of Listers.** Manager Schulz said Lister Chair Thomas Alsheimer is not available this evening but his presence really isn't needed as there aren't any significant changes in this budget from the current fiscal year. The overall budget will decrease by \$5,410, which is about 11.5%. The main reason for this is the line item for the salary of the part-time employee (Charlene Lathrop) will decrease from \$22,510 to \$17,500 to reflect actual expenditures in recent years. Although Ms. Lathrop's work hours have been reduced, her hourly wage will increase by three percent (3%). It may be necessary to discuss the departmental work structure should Ms. Lathrop decide to retire in the near future. Chair Maxwell asked if her work hours are expected to increase eventually. Manager Schulz said that probably wouldn't happen until the next town-wide reappraisal. Also, most of the additional work would be performed by a contracted appraiser. Board member Morse asked if there were anyone who could fill the vacancies quickly should the Listers and/or the part-time employee miss considerable time due to COVID-19, etc. Manager Schulz said Mr. Alsheimer believes he would be able to cover all needed work himself if needed. Should he be absent for some time, the other two (2) Listers and the part-time employee should be able to fill the gap. If there is a catastrophic event that results in Ms. Lathrop and all the Listers being absent, it would be possible to hire an outside consultant to perform the work on an interim basis. The Select Board members also could appoint replacement Listers who would serve until the next Town Meeting. Board member Stevens asked when the next town-wide reappraisal is expected. Manager Schulz believes Northfield's CLA (coefficient of dispersion) is healthy enough (94.78 in 2019) that it probably wouldn't be needed for another five (5) years. In addition, there is a \$138,420 balance in the Lister Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget for the next reappraisal. With \$18,000 to be added in future fiscal years, there should be sufficient funds on hand when the state requires the next town-wide reappraisal. The estimated cost would be about \$200,000.
- b. Northfield Police Department (NPD).** Manager Schulz said in the current proposed FY 2021/2022 budget, the NPD operations and maintenance (O&M) budget would decrease by \$34,720 (1%). This is mainly due to the replacement of two (2) long-term officers with lower salaried replacements. In addition, two (2) full-time NPD officers (Logan Potkowski and Levi Willey) now are on active military service. The former will return to the NPD in 2021 and the latter in 2022. In the interim, their shifts will be filled mostly by lower-salaried part-time officers.

NPD Chief Helfant said the "Technical" line item that funds the salaries of full-time officers will decrease from \$361,580 to \$293,980, which is a \$67,600 difference. Chief Helfant noted \$50,000 of these savings would be offset by increases in the part-time and overtime budgets, which both will increase by \$25,000. According to the current NPD union contract, full-time officers must be provided first refusal on overtime to fill shifts before part-time officers can be asked. Chief Helfant said most of the remaining NPD O&M budget is level-funded with the exception of an increase in the "Department Supplies" line item from \$2,200 to \$3,000. This increase is mainly due to higher ammunition replacement costs. Board member Goodrich asked if the NPD went through much ammunition each year. Chief Helfant said most of the spent ammunition is used during firearms training and recertifications. There also is an occasional need to dispatch injured animals.

Chair Maxwell asked where NPD-related legal expenses are budgeted. Manager Schulz said there is a line item in the Support Services budget that covers all legal expenses incurred by the municipality (with the exception of the utility departments). Given recent NPD personnel issues that have resulted in several high legal bills, Chair Maxwell felt the amount now budgeted may need to be increased. Chief Helfant noted the issues now requiring litigation should be resolved prior to the start of the next fiscal year (07/01/21). There followed a general discussion of the current NPD union contract and its impact on overtime expenses. Manager Schulz felt a more detailed discussion probably should be held in executive session. Board member Stevens asked if the municipality had to pay full or partial salaries to the NPD officers now serving in the military. Chief Helfant said it did not. However, federal law does require that the officers' positions be held until their return.

Turning to the NPD CIP budget, Manager Schulz noted there is a \$5,666 balance in the "Building Improvements" budget with an additional \$2,000 to be added in FY 2021/2022. He noted the Police Station is relatively new (2009) and in good shape after recent renovations to the external walls, etc. Chief Helfant said the only foreseeable need for these funds in the near future is when the building's "surveillance system," i.e., internal and external cameras, will need to be replaced. The current ones were repaired and cleaned this past year but it took some time to find a company able to fix them due to their age. The cameras now provide ninety percent (90%) coverage of the building's interior and exterior. Chair Maxwell would like the replacement cameras to have one hundred percent (100%) coverage with no blind spots.

In the NPD Capital Equipment Plan (CEP) budget, Chief Helfant said he has requested additional funds for replacing desktop computers with laptops so NPD officers can take them in the field, etc. Tasers and new body cameras have been purchased for all the full-time officers but funds still need to be set aside each year for their maintenance and inevitable replacement. The major expense in the NPD CEP budget is the vehicle fleet. Chief Helfant said past policy has been to budget for scheduled replacement of three (3) NPD cruisers while retaining an additional cruiser for non-patrol use and as a backup vehicle. Finance Director Laurie Baroffio felt this policy had been working well until the 2017 Ford Explorer was totaled in a November 2019 accident, which necessitated replacement ahead of schedule. As a result, the 2014 Ford Explorer will be replaced in the next fiscal year at a total budgeted cost of \$45,000. Chief Helfant said there then would be a three (3) year gap period before the next cruiser replacement in FY 2024/2025. The 2018 Ford Explorer then would be retained and become the non-patrol vehicle.

Board member Stevens asked if it were possible to replace the 2014 cruiser at a lower cost with a compact car that could be used for transporting NPD officers to training sessions, to court appearances, etc. Chief Helfant felt that would be a mistake as the backup vehicle sometimes needs to be put on temporary patrol duty if one of the other cruisers is in the repair shop for a prolonged period. If the NPD were down one patrol vehicle for some time, that would make it impossible to provide 24/7 coverage for the community. A vehicle designed for limited, administrative use would sit in the NPD garage far more than it was on the road. Board member Miller believes NPD officers are expected to use their own vehicles for transport to training, etc., for which they are reimbursed afterwards. Chief Helfant confirmed that is in the NPD union contract. He added that due to COVID-19, most of the recent training sessions have been online. Chief Helfant said the NPD probably could get along with only three (3) cruisers while the two full-time officers are away on military duty but there would be a crunch when both of them return. When that happens, there would be seven (7) full-time officers trying to use three (3) NPD cruisers, which would not work. It would be especially bad if one of the cruisers broke down and was out of service for some time. Board member Morse believes it saves money in the long-term for one older cruiser to be retained as a backup vehicle.

- c. Revenue.** Manager Schulz said the revenue figures are estimates of the amounts the municipality will be collecting during FY 2021/2022. We now are estimating a \$20,780 (1.0%) increase. Most of the revenue line items are expected to remain about the same in the next fiscal year. We do anticipate Northfield Ambulance Service (NAS) revenue to increase from \$510,000 to \$540,000. This is projected due to increased NAS run activity in recent years as well as a revised fee schedule. The per capita charge for NAS coverage in Roxbury and Berlin (\$28) will not be increased in the next budget. There had been incremental increases in this charge in recent years and Manager Schulz feels it is now comparable to what other local ambulance services charge for coverage outside their home community. If the rates were raised too high, Roxbury and Berlin might seek other accommodations. Chair Maxwell believes the per capita rate used to be under \$20, which was far too low. This charge could be revisited next year if Northfield falls behind the going rate.

Manager Schulz noted the "annual gift" Norwich University makes to the municipality will increase from \$204,970 to \$213,970 in the next fiscal year. Ms. Baroffio reminded the Select Board members that the current agreement will expire at the end of FY 2021/2022. Manager Schulz said a new agreement will need to be negotiated in the coming year. Manager Schulz said we are anticipating a decrease in interest revenue on investments (from \$15,000 to \$11,000) and an increase in the state's current use payments (from \$115,000 to \$130,000). Board member Goodrich asked why the rent charged NAS for its use of part of the Town Garage keeps going down. Ms. Baroffio said the amount is based the Town Garage's O&M budget so it fluctuates over time.

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled).** There was none.

- V. ADJOURNMENT.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Goodrich, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kenneth L. McCann*

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of January 12, 2021.